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C O N F I D E N T I A L VATICAN 000552

SIPDIS

DEPT. FOR EUR/WE (JLARREA), WHA/MEX

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SUBJECT: IMMIGRATION ON FRONT BURNER FOR MEXICAN BISHOPS, VATICAN

REF: MEXICO 6856

CLASSIFIED BY: Peter Martin, Pol/Econ Chief, Vatican, State.
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

Summary

¶1. (C) Holy See Country Director for the U.S. and Mexico Paolo Gualtieri received with interest points on the President's plans for immigration reform and applauded the President's initiative in tackling the problem. He told us that every group of Mexican bishops visiting the Vatican this fall had raised the issue of immigration, and had bemoaned especially the social disruption that occurred with the separation of families. This attention to immigration is indicative of strong Vatican interest in the issue. The Ambassador has found eager interlocutors on the subject when he has engaged top Holy See officials and Vatican-based diplomats. Post will continue to explore ways in which USG interests coincide with Vatican concerns on the issue.

On the Mexican bishops' political and social involvement, Gualtieri agreed with reftel that the bishops were becoming more active on social issues recently. He felt that over the past ten years clergy were starting to feel better able to play a role in the public square, but that there was still a "long way to go" before some in Mexico overcame the anti-clericalism that had kept priests marginalized. Gualtieri saw no danger that bishops or clergy would "take sides" in partisan political battles. End summary.

Immigration Concerns

¶2. (C) Post passed Holy See Country Director for the U.S. and Mexico Monsignor Paolo Gualtieri points on the President's plans for immigration reform after Gualtieri expressed an interest in the issue to us. Gualtieri did not comment substantively on the plan's details, but he applauded the President's initiative in tackling the problem. He noted that immigration had been on the minds of the Mexican bishops in their quinquennial "ad limina" visits to Rome this fall. [Note: bishops worldwide visit the Vatican once every five years to consult on relevant issues. End note.] "Every group of bishops [that came to visit the Foreign Ministry] raised the issue of immigration," Gualtieri said. They bemoaned the separation of families they said occurred when husbands emigrated to the U.S., leaving wives and children behind. The bishops said that men would frequently begin by sending money back home, but often they would eventually take up with new partners and start new lives in the U.S., leaving broken and destitute families behind. Gualtieri said the bishops had described some villages where 30 percent of the married women had been abandoned. Mexican FM Derbez raised the same issue to Holy See FM Lajolo in his recent visit to the Vatican, according to Gualtieri.

Mexican Bishops More Involved

¶3. (C) Turning to the Church's political and social involvement, Gualtieri agreed with reftel that the Mexican bishops were becoming more active on social issues recently. He also echoed reftel in noting that events such as the Mexican government's making the "morning-after-pill" widely available and free of cost had spurred some prelates to more vocal activism. Gualtieri said that the past ten years had seen an easing of de facto restrictions upon clergy speaking out on ethical and moral issues. "There's still a long way to go," he cautioned. Gualtieri said that the Holy See was still concerned that clergy continued to be unable to play a helpful role in the armed forces, health care, and the mass media, for example.

¶4. (C) As far as a more direct role in politics, Gualtieri is convinced that the bishops will limit their input to encouragement to the political parties to address the real concerns of the people during the electoral campaign. "They'll be careful not to take sides," he insisted. Gualtieri said the clergy knew that if they did more they could easily provoke a backlash against the Church. When asked if the bishops might play a useful role as a peacemaker in the aftermath of close and bitter elections, Gualtieri said it was possible, but warned

that many bishops would be reluctant even then to step into what could be a political minefield.

Comment

15. (C) Gualtieri's comments on the social/political activity of the Mexican bishops track closely with reftel. His interest in the President's immigration initiative and the attention paid to the issue by the bishops on their "ad limina" visits is indicative of strong Vatican and Catholic Church interest in the issue. The Ambassador has found eager interlocutors when he has engaged top Holy See officials and Vatican-based diplomats on the subject. Mary Ann Glendon, President of the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences, moreover, told him December 12 that the Mexican Bishops' Conference had invited the Academy to organize a conference on migration this spring in Mexico. Post will continue to explore ways in which USG interests coincide with Vatican concerns on the issue.

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